



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY



Commission on Children

**General Assembly Committee
on Education
Public Hearing
March 9, 2009**

Testimony submitted by:

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Governor's Bill No. 830, An Act Concerning the Governor's Recommendations Regarding Education

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Connecticut Commission on Children concerning the Governor's recommendations regarding education.

The Commission on Children opposes Section 19 of Bill No. 830. This section would reduce the reimbursement from ten cents to five cents per school lunch served that schools receive if they meet state standards for healthy food served to students.

Our state, like the nation, is experiencing an obesity epidemic that has a significant impact on child health, students' ability to learn and the state health budget.

Nationally the prevalence of overweight children nearly doubled in the past 20 years and nearly tripled for adolescents. In Connecticut, 26 percent of high school students were overweight or obese in 2007.

Adult obesity in Connecticut has increased dramatically as well. More than one in five adults (20.8 percent) were obese in 2007, and most adults (59 percent) were overweight or obese.

The health consequences are severe. Most obese children grow up to be obese adults and suffer from the conditions associated with obesity, including heart disease, stroke and diabetes. Obese children are more likely to smoke, consume alcohol and experiment with drugs as well as have self-esteem and health issues which negatively impact their studies and social life in school.

Obesity has costly direct and indirect consequences for families, health systems and the government programs that pay for emergency and long-term illness care. It is associated with premature death and disability, increased health care costs and lost productivity. In Connecticut, obesity-related health problems for adults cost an estimated \$856 million in annual medical expenses.

Research tells us that good nutrition and exercise not only prevent obesity but are closely tied to successful learning. Until recently, however, Connecticut schools failed to meet the nutritional needs of students. School cafeterias provided many foods that were high in fat and calories, as well as high-calorie, low-nutrition soda.

In 2006, our state enacted one of the leading laws in the nation to improve the nutrition of school foods. The centerpiece was a ten-cent reimbursement to schools that provide healthy foods. The law also banned soda from schools.

This reimbursement not only rewarded schools for improving their food offerings; it also provided them with needed resources to meet the challenge of offering new foods that may initially be less popular with students but will improve learning and lead them to healthful living. Research by the State Department of Education and the Rudd Center at Yale University demonstrate that many schools that provided healthy foods through the reimbursement have succeeded in addressing student wellness in innovative ways.

With the Governor's proposal to reduce the reimbursement, the nutritional value of school food is likely to decline as schools forego the opportunity. It would be unwise to take these resources away from schools when the price of food is increasing and students need nutritious foods in order to succeed in school and develop healthy lifelong eating practices.

We urge you not to reduce the healthy food reimbursement for schools. Thank you for your consideration of the Commission's views on this important issue.